ROEDING PARK
890 W. Belmont
Fresno
Fresno County
California

HALS CA-59
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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY
PACIFIC WEST REGIONAL OFFICE
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1111 Jackson Street, Suite 700
Oakland, CA 94607

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY

ROEDING PARK

HALS NO. CA-59

Location: 890 West Belmont Avenue, Fresno, California 93728. West of Golden State Boulevard, bounded by Belmont, Olive Avenues and State Route 99, Fresno, Fresno County, California.
Lat: 36.75041 Long: -119.81988 (Park Entry/Exit at Belmont Avenue and Torreon Drive, Google Earth, Simple Cylindrical Projection, WGS84).

Significance: Roeding Park is significant under National Register criteria A for its association with events that have made a significant contribution to the development of municipal parks in California. Roeding Park exemplifies the naturalistic style of parks that was popularized during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Many of the original distinct features remain and retain integrity. It also qualifies under criteria B for its association with George C. Roeding (1868 – 1928) and landscape architect Johannes Reimers (1856 – 1953). Roeding, the son of Frederick and Marianne Roeding, was born in San Francisco, where he attended school. He began his career when he was charged with overseeing the 640-acre Fancher Creek Nursery founded by his father.

Fancher Creek Nurseries was incorporated in 1884 and developed as the Roeding Home Place, advertised at the time as the largest nursery west of the Rockies. According to Roeding's biographer, Henry W. Kruckeberg, *"The Roeding Home Place soon assumed horticultural importance that attracted visitors from all parts of the world, and was destined to become historical as the place where Smyrna fig culture was first introduced in the United States."*

The Smyrna fig was one of Roeding's earliest passions. It was not commercially successful at first, but through eighteen years of determined efforts Roeding succeeded in establishing the industry, partly by importing a wasp (*Blastophaga grossorum*) from Asia Minor for fertilization, which he described in his 1903 monograph, "The Smyrna Fig at Home and Abroad." These efforts gained Roeding the title "Father of Smyrna Fig Culture."

Roeding also experimented with olives — at one time testing 25 varieties at the Roeding Home Place — which led to the formation of Roeding Fig & Olive Company in 1904. Roeding was a contemporary of Luther Burbank, who was experimenting with propagating, testing and hybridizing fruit varieties in Santa Rosa, California. Roeding was the first to introduce many of Burbank's hybrids that achieved commercial success in the early 1900s, including the Santa Rosa, Formosa and Gaviota plums as well as the Plumcot — a hybrid between an apricot and a plum.

Roeding not only tested and developed a variety of fruits, he experimented with packing methods that would preserve and protect them for long-distance shipping. This was a key to securing California's position as the leading distributor of fresh fruit to the rest of the United States. He also developed new packaging methods for Japanese persimmons, grapes and figs.

Roeding expanded his operations in 1917 with the purchase of the 463-acre California Nursery Company in Niles. It had been the largest nursery in the western U.S., founded by John Rock — considered "California's foremost plants man" — who introduced many fruits to California's fruit industry. Roeding also formed the Fresno Nursery Company and the Niles Nursery Company, combining them with Fancher Creek Nursery and California Nursery Company in a holding company called the George C. Roeding Company.

From 1904 to 1907, when the original trees were being selected and planted for Roeding Park, George Roeding maintained a professional relationship with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). At their request he accepted, planted and evaluated the performance of many tree species introduced to California. A 1910 article in the San Francisco Call reported, "*The United States Department of Agriculture has made arrangements with the secretary of the board of park commissioners to use Roeding Park as an experiment station. All of their importations gathered by agricultural explorers visiting foreign countries, rare trees and shrubs, have been sent for trial, and as a consequence the Fresno park has valuable trees from Africa, Asia and the Pacific Islands, all thriving and doing well.*" This long-term relationship with the USDA led to Roeding's appointment as a member of the Advisory Committee to the USDA, and later to the U.S. Food Administration.

George Roeding played a role in the allied victory during World War I when the War Department commissioned him to supply 5,000 tons of peach pits and apricot shells to make charcoal for gas masks. It had been found that these materials were far more effective than charcoal produced from wood, and he offered his service to the government without charge. When he died, President Herbert Hoover sent this note acknowledging Roeding's contribution during the war: "*It was my good fortune to have the association of Mr. Roeding in public work during and after the Great War. His was an example of willing sacrifice to public service and constant solicitude for the public good.*"

Because of his position in business and his active role in civic affairs, Roeding was appointed Park Commissioner for the City of Fresno from 1905 to 1912. He served as President of the Pacific Coast Association of Nurserymen from 1910 to 1911, when he founded the California Association of Nurserymen along with 14 other charter members. Roeding served as consulting horticulturalist to the Panama-Pacific Exposition at San Francisco, playing a key role in the construction of the Valley Building as well as the exhibit for San Joaquin

County. He was appointed to the Board of Regents for the State University at Berkeley (now the University of California, Berkeley) in 1915. Roeding was elected president of the State Agricultural Society in 1917, and in that capacity oversaw the state fair.

Still another of Roeding's civic roles was as an advocate for "The Garden Beautiful" program in California's state prison system. He donated plants and supported and encouraged prisoners to develop skills as gardeners, offering several men short-term jobs when they were released. They were able to complete their work experience and ultimately re-enter the job market. Roeding was most actively involved with San Quentin Prison in Marin County, expressing these thoughts about the benefits of the program: "*I am firmly of the opinion that a reformatory work of this kind . . . . will prove a valuable asset to . . . prisoners . . . society . . . for its humanity in the redemption of damaged lives.*"

Johannes Reimers

Born in Norway in 1858, Johannes Reimers settled in California as a young man. He studied at the San Francisco Art Institute and attained fame as an artist. Some of his works are found in the collection at the Oakland Art Museum and the Art Institute of Chicago. He was also a writer, producing an early review of Jack London's *Call of the Wild*; articles about plants, gardens and gardening; and a novel set in Norway, "Unto the Heights of Simplicity." As the landscape architect for the San Joaquin Division of the Santa Fe Railway, he originated the plan to embellish each depot with small parks. It was through his advocacy that parks were constructed at each station from Ashcroft, Arizona, to Richmond, California.

The City of Fresno hired Reimers as a city gardener, in part because of his knowledge — gained while working for Santa Fe — about what species would thrive in hot, dry climates. He went on to complete plans for both Hobart and Roeding Parks. A third park design attributed to Reimers is Mooney Grove Park in Visalia, California, undertaken in 1910. Reimers also designed the garden for the headquarters of the California Nursery Company in Niles, when it was owned by George Roeding. As a contemporary and personal friend of Jack and Charmian London, Reimers advised them about plantings at their Beauty Ranch property in Glen Elen, California.

Johannes Reimers died in San Leandro, California, in 1953. Kurt Culbertson wrote a book about Reimers for the third edition of "Pioneers of American Landscape Design".

In summary, George C. Roeding played a key role in California's nursery industry at a time when great numbers of new plants — both ornamental and food-producing — were being introduced, tested and developed. Along with

other pioneers in this field, Roeding helped establish not only the Central Valley but California itself as an agricultural mecca. His contributions to the industry were acknowledged by President Herbert Hoover and by numerous appointments to local, state and national positions.

Roeding Park is noteworthy for its extraordinary collection and wide variety of exceptional specimen trees, and as an outstanding example of landscape architect Johannes Reimers' naturalistic design style, popularized during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. For more than one hundred years Roeding Park has provided Fresnans with a community space for family gatherings and major civic celebrations. An article by Charles Chambers published in 1909 in The American Florist, "The Parks of Fresno, Calif," made this claim about Roeding Park: *"This park is considered one of the finest in the state considering its age and in a few years it will be considered one of the beauty spots of our famous state."*

Description: Roeding Park is located in the southwest quadrant of the City of Fresno, in California's agriculturally rich Central Valley. This 148-acre designed landscape is both a park and arboretum. The park is generally square in shape. The Chaffee Zoo occupies approximately one third of the acreage in the middle of the southern half of the park. It is separated from the park by a two-lane park road, with parking, and a chain link fence. The remainder of the park retains much of its original character — a park and arboretum designed in a naturalistic style.

The southeast corner of the park includes lily ponds, two large group picnic areas, horseshoe pits and a dog park. The north third of the park includes a tennis complex in the northwest corner, several more group picnic areas, a pergola, a street car shelter, two outdoor dance floors and a memorial to Japanese-Americans at the mid point along the east side of the park.

The southwest corner includes Storyland, Playland and Lake Washington. Storyland is a fairy tale theme park for young children and Playland is an amusement park with rides. These two areas, as well as the zoo, are fenced and require separate entrance fees.

<u>Park Entries</u>
There are two entrances into the park: the main entry on the south side, on West Belmont Avenue, and another entry on the north side, from Olive Avenue. Both are marked by curvilinear rough stone walls set back into the park, forming broad, gracious entries. The detailing of these walls is similar, but each has unique "gateway" elements.

The same stone was used to build a wall around the park in the 1960s. The wall is 13 inches wide, with a flat stone cap, and varies in height from 19 to 48 inches. In most places it is topped with a four-foot chain-link fence, and where

side streets abut the park there are 33-inch-wide openings in the wall to accommodate pedestrian access. On the west side of the park, along Highway 99, there is a six-foot-high concrete block wall, painted blue on the park side.

Circulation

A main drive loops through the park from the West Belmont entry, but is blocked to through traffic just past the entrance to the zoo. It is not apparent why the original looped circulation was changed. The main road is 70[1] to 80 feet wide, one lane in each direction, with a planted median and parallel parking on both sides. Diagonal parking is integrated into the median. Planting in the median includes mown turf or trees — primarily Camphor (*Cinnemomum camphora*) — with shrubs below. As one drives through the park there is a clearly delineated primary circulation route that looses clarity where it merges with surface parking for Playland and the Chaffee Zoo.

There are several secondary roads that branch off from the main drive. These roads are 40 feet wide, sufficient for one lane in each direction and parallel parking on each side. There is no painted center line or marked parking, which conveys the impression of a gracious, generous roadway. All of the park roads are gently curving. Triangular-shaped planting islands — made from the same stone used in the park perimeter wall — are located where roads merge, to help facilitate the flow of traffic. These are planted with a variety of trees and shrubs.

There are few pedestrian circulation paths within the park, leaving visitors to walk along the driving lanes or across lawns. Where paths occur they are uncolored, brushed concrete varying in width from four to eight feet. Outside the park there are sidewalks along Olive Avenue and Belmont Avenue. Park paths connect to the sidewalks at the two main park entries.

An eight-foot-wide pedestrian path, with par course equipment, is located around the Umbrella Grove, Dog Park and the horseshoe pits, north of the lily ponds. There are also paths around the tennis courts and leading to the zoo from the parking area. Narrow paths provide access to each of the restroom buildings.

Vegetation

Roeding Park is both a park and an arboretum. More than half of the acreage consists almost exclusively of broad expanses of turf planted with trees laid out in informal groupings that loosely define large open areas of lawn. There is a tremendous variety of mature tree species throughout the park. Sometimes a single, isolated specimen is placed to mark a view or fill a lawn area, but more frequently trees are grouped. These groupings vary in numbers. For example, they might consist of five Cork oaks (*Quercus suber*) with overlapping canopies, or a group of 30 towering fan palms — a mix of Mexican and California

[1] For this study measurements are approximate unless a specific dimension with feet and inches is noted.

(*Washingtonia robusta and W. filifera*).

In addition to the species listed above there are outstanding examples of many trees, including Blue atlas cedars (*Cedrus atlantica* `Glauca'), catalpa (*Catalpa speciosa*), Canary island pine (*Pinus canariensis*), date palms (*Phoenix canariensis*), deodar cedars (*Cedrus deodar*), maidenhair tree (*Ginkgo biloba*), pepper tree (*Schinus molle*), silkoak (*Grevillea robusta*), and many varieties of eucalyptus. There are many species of palms throughout the park, including a few exceptional sago palms (*Cycas revoluta*).

Over one hundred species of trees are thriving in the park. Most are mature specimens in good condition, and some new trees have been added throughout the park. Several tree surveys have been done for the park, at different periods of time, providing good, detailed records of what species have been planted.

Shrubs are used sparingly in much of the park, and, where shrubs do occur, beds are typically defined by flush six-inch-wide concrete curbs to facilitate mowing of the adjacent lawn. Many of these shrubs — including oleander (*Nerium oleander)* and tobira (*Pittosporum tobira*) — have attained substantial size, with stout or multi-trunks.

The character of the planting within the Chaffee Zoo and Storyland is quite different from the park/arboretum. In these areas the planting is much more dense. Vegetation is used, particularly in the zoo, to separate and screen exhibits. There are expansive views, looking between tree trunks, in the arboretum portion of the park. Views into the zoo, however, are screened by dense shrub plantings. By design, portions of the zoo feel like a dense jungle, and in places one walks through tunnels of vegetation.

There are more small-scale and decorative planting beds in Storyland than elsewhere in the park. In Playland, planting is limited to mature trees and a few contained shrub beds; most of the area within Playland is pavement around the amusement rides.

Topography

The topography throughout the park was artfully and subtly contoured by landscape architect Johannes Reimers. While land surrounding the park is relatively flat, Reimers used grading to elevate or lower areas within the park to create specific effects and control the experience of the visitor. Major excavations were implemented to create a series of ponds in the southeast section of the park, and to build Lake Washington in the southwest corner.

The Eucalyptus Grove multi-family picnic area sits in a broad depression, while the Pine Grove picnic area rests on a gentle knoll. The tennis courts in the northwest corner are set low, which helps to downplay the lines of chain link

fencing and associated equipment when viewed from other areas of the park.

Buildings

There are prefabricated entry kiosks at each of the two main entries. A residential-scale building just inside the Belmont Avenue entrance serves as the zoo office. (It was previously the park office.) The building has wood siding and a shake roof. A new concrete path leads to the front door, and the rear of the building is fenced.

Identical restroom structures, built according to a simple design in concrete blocks, are evenly distributed throughout the park. There are two small utility buildings (approximately 18 feet x 12 feet) with attached fenced equipment yards.

Buildings within the zoo include the entry building, the Safari Trading Company Gift Shop, a small rustic cabin building with a stone fireplace that now serves as the Zookeeper's office, the Reptile House, the Elephant Barn facility, the Safari Café and a Veterinary Hospital. In the northeast corner of the zoo there is a complex of newer buildings used for education, a laboratory and marketing and development offices.

Within Playland there is a concessions-ticket booth at the entry. Storyland has many buildings — all miniatures modeled on fairy tales.

Structures

Picnic Shelters: There are three picnic shelter structures for group use. Their rustic character is similar to the style of structures built by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) crews during the depression. Each has stout, stone columns with trapezoidal shapes. The two larger of these structures are approximately 72 feet x 32 feet with four stone columns on each side. Originally they had shake roofs that have now been replaced with brown aluminum roofing.

The picnic structures sit on concrete slabs, and each has seven 20-foot-long concrete picnic tables shaded by the roof structure. The Palm Point picnic area accommodates about 150 picnickers. A second similarly-sized picnic structure is in the Pine Grove picnic area. This site includes a graded apron that extends the useable picnic area on the east side of the structure. The third covered, somewhat smaller picnic area was constructed in the same style, and was built as a street car shelter.

The park also includes dozens of additional picnic areas without shelters that are shaded by the canopies of mature trees. Several picnic areas are laid out to accommodate large groups — others would be suitable for medium to small groups — and there are single, isolated picnic tables for couples or individual families. The Cedar Grove picnic area occupies an area approximately 85 feet x

75 feet. Facilities include thirty-five picnic tables, three double barbeques, two work tables, one trash enclosure, three trash cans, and three lights for evening use. Facilities at the Umbrella Grove picnic area are similar.

Music Stand: The Lisenby Music Stand was inaccessible at the time of this study. It is enclosed within a tall chain-link fence laced with bamboo fabric and engulfed by the Winged Wonders Bird Show exhibit. Historic photos and what I could see of the roof of this building suggest that it is a grand edifice. There is a large outdoor amphitheater associated with the music stand. The soil to build the massive semi-circular mound for the amphitheater came from the excavation of Lake Washington in the southwest corner of the park. The mound is steeply sloped on the back side – offering a temping landform for children to run up and down, and has a gently-sloped, bowl-shape facing the music stand, with bleacher seating capable to accommodating large numbers of concert attendees.

Pergola: A 100-foot-long curving pergola is located at the center of the park, north of the main entry road. This elegant structure leads to the street car shelter. It consists of Tuscan-style masonry columns, two feet in diameter, that taper slightly at the top. Each is set on a 30-inch-square base. The columns are spaced twelve feet apart. The width of the pergola is fifteen feet, six inches.

Double 2 x 12 inch wood beams sit on top of the columns, topped by a lattice built from 2 x 8 inch wood members that form a grid approximately two feet by four feet. The entire structure is densely covered with wisteria vines that have thick, tangled canes. Sculptural Hollywood junipers (*Juniperus torulosa*) are planted between the columns on the outside of the pergola.

There are three shallow steps leading up and into the pergola walk from the main drive. As you walk through the pergola there is a level area, then a series of five steps, another level area, and another five steps up. The classic styling of this structure is a notable contrast to the rustic character of other park structures.

Dance Floors: Two simply designed dance floors include night lighting and elevated stages. One is on the east side, at about the mid point, and the other is near the tennis courts, in the northwest portion. Each dance floor is approximately 120 feet by 80 feet. The stages are 13.5 feet x 10.5 feet and 30 inches high, surrounded by a simple galvanized-pipe railing. Each dance floor has 6 lights on green metal poles about 30 feet high. One of the dance floors has 16 backless wood benches with galvanized pipe legs. These are set in 2 rows along one side of the dance floor. The benches are placed on a sloping concrete slab nine feet wide. Each bench is 16 feet long and 12 inches high.

Playgrounds: Two traditional playgrounds are located in the north half of the park. Each includes metal climbing structures, drinking fountains and seating areas. The newer of the two has a climbing wall and a concrete path surrounding

the play structure, suitable for tricycle traffic. A massive, broad-spreading cork oak, immediately adjacent to this play area, offers shade to picnic tables.

Horseshoe Enclosure: The park has an area set aside for playing horseshoes. It is approximately 60 feet by 75 feet, surrounded by a four-foot chain-link fence with green fabric. Eight horseshoe pits are laid out inside the enclosure, with turf between the pits.

Tennis Complex: A large complex in the northwest corner of the park has fourteen tennis courts and one handball court. Amenities include fencing and gates, aluminum bleachers, billboards for scheduling games during tournaments, benches, trash, drinking fountains, nearby parking, and picnic and restroom facilities. All of the courts appear to have been recently renovated and include night lighting.

Dog Park: A relatively recent addition to the park is a two-part dog park for small and large dogs that covers an area approximately 150 feet x 210 feet. It is surrounded by a chain-link fence with entry gates and includes accessories such as trash, dog bags, park rules signage, benches and a multi-user drinking fountain. Included within the dog park are mature park trees.

Playland: In the southwest corner of the park, Playland is surrounded by a new, six-foot-tall, black ornamental iron fence and gate. Amusement park rides include a range of age-appropriate options, including race cars, caterpillars, flying helicopters, a trampoline, a small roller coaster, two different-sized Ferris wheels, the Willis & Kyle Express miniature train, tilt-a-wheel, and a traditional merry-go-round with music that can be heard throughout this portion of the park. There are a series of square metal shade structures at the entry to Playland, painted red, green, blue or yellow.

Near Playland, and west of the Belmont entry, is a full-size train locomotive donated to the park by the Southern Pacific Company and delivered by military personnel from Fort Ord in 1956. Engine number 1238 was built in 1918.

Storyland: A train station for the miniature train links Storyland to Playland, to several pedestrian bridges over a shallow, concrete-lined stream — each with a unique design — and to other structures that are part of this children's fairytale land. Each exhibit is based on a classic fairytale or children's story, including among many others Mother Goose, the Wicked Witch, the Crooked Man, Hansel and Gretel, and Alice in Wonderland. There is a richly detailed pirate ship and a castle with a party room in the tower.

Zoo: The Chaffee Zoo includes many structures needed to house and display animals and to provide safe, accessible access for viewing the animals. The character of the structures and buildings in the zoo is notably different from

those found in the park/arboretum. Some of the zoo structures incorporate dramatic angular, projecting elements and triangularly shaped canopies. Other zoo structures include Japanese-style detailing. There are also adobe-style walls, large timber elements and more. Each exhibit is unique and correlates with the featured animal or country to which it's native.

Maintenance Yard: North of the zoo there is a four-acre city maintenance yard and employee parking lot where equipment, materials and vehicles are stored. There are several small utilitarian buildings and structures in this area.

Monuments and Donor Recognition Features

The park includes several monuments, but not so many that they become intrusive. Most are subtle bronze plaques mounted on boulders or engraved stone. Monuments include the following:

- Near the zoo office, a two-foot-high bronze bust of George C. Roeding holding a fox that is mounted on a three-foot-high triangular pedestal.
- Also located near the zoo office, a granite boulder six feet, six inches high, nine feet wide and four feet deep with a 22"x14" bronze plaque that reads: "Roeding Park a gift of Frederick and Marianne Roeding to the City of Fresno May 2, 1903."
- Inside the zoo on a concrete base, a bronze plaque that reads: "Dedicated to the Children of Fresno and San Joaquin Valley in Memory of the George C. Roeding Family, 1953."
- Near the Umbrella Grove, a granite boulder 22"x31-36"x24" engraved "Presented to the City of Fresno 1980 North Fresno Rotary, President Besley A. Lewis, With Special Thanks to the Park and Recreation Department of Fresno."
- At Lake Washington, a 29-inch-high bronze bust of President George Washington, mounted on a 39"x48" granite pedestal with two 12"x18" engraved bronze plaques that read: "Washington Memorial Grove, A Gift of the Boys and Girls of Fresno, 1930." An engraving in the back states that the monument was made by the Superior Granite Company in Clovis. It is set in a flush concrete band that measures nine by sixteen feet.
- Outside Storyland facing the parking lot, a "United We Stand" tile mosaic that references the 911 terrorist attack on New York's twin Towers.
- At the entry to Playland, a granite memorial to the Challenger Astronauts that is 7 feet 2 inches by 5 feet 3 inches.

The most elaborate monument is dedicated to the Japanese-Americans from the Central Valley who lost their lives during World War II. This monument is currently located on the east edge of the park and consists of two levels of lawn, flanked by shrub beds, and a granite monument that measures 20 feet wide and varies in height from 32 inches to seven feet, two inches. To the left, as one faces

the monument, there is a tight group of three very large Italian cypress (*Cupressus sempervirens* `Italica') and to the right are stumps from a matching group. At the monument, along the centerline, stands a mature columnar Auracaria tree.

There are several features within Chaffee Zoo that recognize donors. The character of these features is more varied in design and materials, and includes:

- A Japanese-style wood structure with lanterns and donor plaques, on the ramp up to the primate cage.
- A large stone monument shaped like a stylized elephant.
- A free-standing panel collage of terra-cotta carved zoo animals with donor names.
- A granite boulder engraved with Chaffee Zoological Gardens
- A small bronze plaque, mounted on the outside of the Reptile House, identifying it as a memorial to Edward Kane.
- Donor bricks used for paving.
- An etched bronze panel honoring Dr. Paul Chaffee, Zoo Director 1965 - 1990, mounted on several short logs.

Water Features

Lily Ponds: Just inside the Belmont entrance and to the east is a series of five ponds. Each has low, rounded concrete edging and is laid out in a curvilinear form. Three of the five have islands lushly planted with trees and shrubs. Wooden bridges have simple, galvanized pipe handrails.

Most of the ponds are shaded by canopy trees offering quiet, cool places beneath. Water lilies, including many varieties collected from around the world, originally donated by W.S. Tevis still fill some of the ponds, and children continue to fish here, in keeping with the original intent.

The pond farthest to the east features an ornately decorated cast fountain approximate 36 inches in diameter and 48 inches above the water level. A jet of water shoots up from the fountain 15 fifteen feet. This feature is visible to drivers near the Belmont Circle at the southeast corner of the park.

Lake Washington: The other important original water feature is Lake Washington. It has a concrete edge, and like the lily ponds is laid out with a gently curving, naturalistic form. Historically, a Japanese Pagoda and garden existed on the island in Lake Washington. Today, a pirate ship sits shipwrecked on the shore and is part of a boat ride rental from Playland.

When Highway 99 was constructed a portion of Lake Washington was traded for a triangular plot of land north of the Lake. Unfortunately, the take reduced the size of the lake by about half, and the triangular addition has not been well integrated into the park.

Other Water Features: In addition to the constructed stream running through Storyland there are water features in the zoo as part of the animal exhibits, and in Playland there is a modern water-play area.

Small-Scale Features

Each of the picnic areas has rustic stone barbeques, most have stone trash enclosures, and there are three small stone drinking fountains that all appear to have been constructed at the same time period. Playland has one uniquely designed barbeque that is a round stone-and-concrete structure with three grills and integral concrete counter surfaces. The detailing of these features is similar to work performed by WPA crews.

Distinctively designed wood benches and picnic tables are found throughout the park. These consist of two-inch-thick wood members and galvanized legs that flare out, forming a trapezoidal shape, similar to the columns that support the picnic shelter structures. These appear to date to the historic period of the park, and their condition varies from fair to poor. Newer picnic tables are vinyl-coated steel made by Wabash. Typically, the historic and new tables are set either in a flush curbed area or on a concrete slab, to facilitate mowing of adjacent lawn.

Throughout the park there are custom-designed precast concrete benches with gracefully curving backs and seats. These are five feet, ten inches long, have no arms, and are installed with a concrete pad, to facilitate mowing. Near the lily ponds there are eight cut pieces of granite varying in size from seven to nine feet long, seven to fourteen inches wide and eight to twelve inches high. The character of these features suggests that they are not original to the park.

There is one unique drinking fountain near the dog park. It is made from small, rounded, light-gray cobbles varying in size from two to five inches. The fountain is four feet square, 29 inches high, and has two working spigots.

A modern interpretation of a historic park feature is located inside the park but oriented to be viewed by drivers traveling on Belmont. It is an American flag, 20 feet high by 30 feet long, made of concrete with deep scoring to create stripes, painted red, white and blue. This feature replaced a similar monument that was originally done in multi-colored flowers by the park's chief gardener from 1920 to 1960, Rocco Manuto.

A few additional small-scale features appear to have been added over the lifetime of the park.

Signage

The historic portions of the park are remarkably free of signage, and where it is needed the design, materials and placement is executed in a non-intrusive

manner. Signs are typically constructed of wood with carved, painted lettering. There are signs at each exhibit in Storyland that identify which fairy tale is depicted. These are uniquely designed, playful, small and low. There are many signs in many styles within the zoo, including directional, educational and donor recognition signs.

Lighting

Various styles of lights are found throughout the park, reflecting the adjacent uses. At the Belmont entrance there are ornately detailed fixtures, whereas the picnic grounds and dance floors are lighted by simple fixtures on plain, metal poles about thirty feet tall. In Storyland the lights are ornamental and mounted on twelve-foot poles, in keeping with the child-sized environment. Chaffee Zoo has strings of festive ornamental bulbs as well as "zoo lights" shaped like animals. The lights at the tennis complex have modern, box-shaped luminiers.

History:

On 4 May 1903 Frederick Christian Roeding and his wife Marianne donated 71.76 acres of land to the City of Fresno to build a community park. On 7 April 1908 the Roedings donated an additional 46.64 acres. Sixteen years later, on 2 January 1924, the City of Fresno purchased an additional 40 acres from the Roedings, bringing the total size of the park to 159.78 acres.

In September of 1903 the City of Fresno retained landscape architect Johannes Reimers from Stockton, California, to prepare detailed drawings and specifications for the layout of the park, for the sum of $300. George Christian Roeding, son of Frederick and Marianne Roeding, worked with Reimers on the park development in his capacity as park commissioner. Roeding also donated most of the trees planted in the park.

Construction of the park began immediately with the planting of trees. Between 1904 and 1906, 55 of the original acres had been planted. By the end of 1906 the remaining portion of the original 40 acres of tree planting was complete. Records note that the original eucalyptus were started from three-foot-tall specimens with quarter-inch-diameter trunk calipers. A bamboo garden was planted in 1905, palms were planted east of the main entry drive between 1905 and 1906, and the Arizona garden as well as the rose garden — which are no longer extant — were planted during the same time period.

Grading of the roads, originally composed of oiled and compacted earth, was underway in 1906. On 19 December 1906 the design for the pergola and wisteria planting was approved. Excavation work to create one of the lakes was underway in November of 1907.

By 1910 Park Commissioner Charles A. Chambers was directing the work. One of his first major projects was to upgrade the road system by applying a hard

surface, using clay excavated from the lake construction.

In 1912, as the City of Fresno grew and a trolley system was being built, the decision was made to add a street car station in Roeding Park. That structure is still known as the street car shelter. The trolley line continued beyond the park boundary to the southwest, terminating at Mountain View Cemetery, where Frederick, Marianne, George C and Elizabeth Thorne Roeding are interred. Service on this line continued until 1939.

Sixteen thousand feet of paths had been surfaced by 1914, plans were underway to build a pressurized system for irrigating the park, and Park Superintendent Claybaugh was directing the construction of rustic arbors, tables and benches for the picnic areas. The state Fish and Game department had donated trout to stock the ponds in the park for fishing.

Four tennis courts were added in the 1920s, and Mr. and Mrs. A.V. Lisenby donated funds to build the Music Stand, which continued to offer outdoor concerts until at least 1972.

A zoo component was also added in the 1920s, when residents began donating animals. The City of Placerville gave two bears to the park in 1923. The Fresno Zoological Society formed in 1949, the same year that a campaign was begun to raise funds to buy an elephant. The first zoo director, Eldon M. "Curly" Blocker, was hired away from the San Diego Zoo that same year and lived for a time with his wife Marie and their children in the house that now serves as the zookeeper's office. "Nosey" the elephant made her debut on 11 September 1949, and continued as a beloved attraction until her death at age 47 in 1996.

Over the years the size of the zoo has been expanded to accommodate more exhibits and additional animals. The name of the zoo was changed in 1985 to "The Fresno Zoo" and in 1990 to "Chaffee Zoological Gardens" in honor of long-term director Paul Chaffee, DVM, who served after Curly Blocker's retirement in 1965 through 1990. In 1993, under third zoo director Ralph M. Waterhouse, the Lisenby Music Stand area was incorporated into the zoo and fenced off from the rest of the park.

On 2 April 1927 an event honoring the original donors, Frederick and Marianne Roeding, took place.

In 1930 a Japanese Tea House and gardens were construction on the island in the large lake in the southwest corner of the park. One year later a Japanese Association gave 100 flowering cherry trees, which were planted around the lake. In September of 1939 a local group of Japanese-Americans purchased a large stone lantern from Japan "as symbol of friendship and cooperation." It was installed in the Japanese garden, but the lantern was vandalized and the Tea

House was torn down after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Nisei Liberty Post 5869 donated a new monument in 1950, inscribed "in sacred memory of American soldiers of Japanese ancestry of the Central Valley who gave their lives so that liberty, justice, equality, and the pursuit of happiness might come to all democratic and peace loving people regardless of race, color or national origin."

In 1932 a portion of the park was carved out for Belmont Circle, 300 feet in diameter, as part of the Belmont subway construction to replace the former Belmont Avenue at-grade railroad crossing at the Southern Pacific Railroad running between Golden State Boulevard and Weber Avenue. This was also the year that Chief Gardener Rocco Manuto first planted the American flag on Belmont, using red, white and blue flowers. More acreage of the park was taken in 1946, when Highway 99 was constructed.

Roeding Park has received large numbers of visitors from the very beginning, as it does to this day. Newspaper articles dating from its earliest years provide evidence that the Park has long been a treasured community resource. It created a sense of pride for residents, and special holiday events at Easter, Mothers Day, Memorial Day and during the Christmas season drew large crowds. Headlines alone tell the story: "Roeding Park is Already Bringing Fame to Fresno as a Beauty Spot" (1910); "Labor Day Picnic is Great Success" (1918); and "Fresno Park Lures Thousands" (1931).

The community also took great pride in its new showplace of trees. A 1935 front-page article in the California County Life section of the Fresno Bee proclaimed "Beautiful Trees Enhance Fame of Fresno." This pride was evidenced by the tremendous community effort to plant over 600 trees at Lake Washington to commemorate the 200th anniversary of President George Washington's birth. School children from Fresno raised money for a granite monument and bronze bust of Washington, and students planted 622 trees of 310 species and varieties as part of the celebration. The new grove was dedicated 7 March 1932.

Members of Fresno's Rotary club raised funds to build Playland amusement park in 1955, and Storyland was added in 1962.

Members of the Roeding family were invited to visit the park in 2004 as part of a celebration marking the 101st anniversary of the original land donation that made Roeding Park a reality. A granite monument with a commemorative plaque was installed near the zoo office.

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September 24, 2010

Photo

Caption

The lily pond in the southeast corner of Roeding Park features a curvilinear edge, a ramp into the pond for maintenance, water lilies and a fisherman. In the background are mature shade trees framing one of the open lawn areas. View is northeast. (Chris Pattillo, September 2010).

Photo

Caption

The Pine Grove picnic area was built in the rustic style, with trapezoidal columns and concrete picnic tables 20 feet long. View is to the north. (Chris Pattillo, September 2010).

Photo

Caption

According to Sunset Western Garden Book, the Camphor Tree (*Cinnemomum camphora*) grows slowly to 50 feet tall and 60 feet wide, but this colossal specimen north of the zoo entrance is estimated at 85 feet tall with a 95-foot spread. A Maidenhair Tree (*Ginkgo biloba*) is also planted in the median of the main entry drive, at left. View is to the east. (Chris Pattillo, September 2010).

Photo

Caption

A grove of fan palms near the Japanese-American memorial on the east side of the park is one example of the many multi-tree plantings of palms. A single table and barbeque offer a quiet place for a picnic. View is southeast, with Golden State Boulevard on the left. (Chris Pattillo, September 2010).